

# THINKING OUTSIDE THE BOOK

by Jessica Mangelson and Jill Castek

## Engaging Students with WebQuests

**W**ebQuests are activities based on a self-contained set of online resources that follow a predictable format. They can be personalized to support any content and customized for any grade level. Most are designed around an authentic task that invites exploration with Web resources tailored to the task and content being explored. WebQuests are designed to transform newly acquired information into a more sophisticated understanding. They offer engaging activities that promote synthesis, critical understanding, authentic assessment, and analysis of information.

Quality WebQuests push students to solve problems, think about issues, search for relevant information, and summarize findings. Students are not left to wander from site to site looking for information, but rather are given guidelines, structure, and relevant material designed to support a learning goal. This maximizes instructional time by providing succinct information, freeing the student to concentrate on completing the assignment using analytical thinking skills.

### Overview of WebQuests

Bernie Dodge, a professor at San Diego State University, developed the WebQuest model in 1995 to support greater Internet integration in K–12 classrooms. The model is made up of six parts: (1) an *introduction* that provides a hook to engage learners in the activity; (2) a *task description* that explains the problem

that students will collaboratively solve; (3) a list of *resources* that students access online to collect information; (4) an overview of the *process*, including a set of steps that students are expected to follow as they read and examine the resources; (5) a *conclusion* that invites students to share ideas and reflect on what they've learned; and (6) an *assessment tool* for evaluating students' work. The San Diego State University WebQuest page acts as a portal for more than 2,500 educator-developed WebQuests. This Web site has an embedded search feature that makes it easy to find WebQuests that support your curriculum goals. It also offers easy-to-use templates for creating your own WebQuests.

### Getting Started with WebQuests

Whether you know a lot about WebQuests or are just learning about these valuable teaching tools, the Web sites described in this article will help you determine the purpose and uses for WebQuests. The examples given will also help you become more familiar with the format of WebQuests and the ways they can be used to support student learning.

Web Institute for Teachers uses an interactive WebQuest format to introduce WebQuests to educators. Explore this Web site to become acquainted with the WebQuest format and to begin thinking about how you might utilize this instructional technique in your classroom.

### Which WebQuest Is Right for My Class?

There are numerous ready-made WebQuests available online. However, they vary greatly in quality and currency and require careful consideration before being implemented with students. A common pitfall of ready-made WebQuests can be the number of broken links in the resources section. While the creator of an individual WebQuest has linked to appropriate Web sites for students to examine, the designer has little control over the maintenance of these sites. For this reason, you may find that a great many resources within a given WebQuest have become inactive. As you assess the quality of ready-made WebQuests, be sure to check that the links are in working order. It is also important to review WebQuests to decide if they meet the highest standards and present information

in a format that complements inquiry-based learning. Avoid WebQuests that seem more like worksheets and less like interactive learning experiences. A few critical questions to ask yourself before using a WebQuest include:



**"WebQuests are a great way to engage students in responding to literature, using the Internet, and solving authentic problems."**



## WEB CONNECTIONS

All "Thinking Outside the Book" columns are available with links to their recommended Web resources on the *Book Links* Web site at <http://www.ala.org/booklinks>. The most recent column can be accessed in the "Browse the Current Issue" section, while past columns may be found in the "Archive of Online Articles" section.

- What do I want my students to learn?
- Why is this information important?
- Where does the WebQuest best fit within the context of this unit?
- How does the WebQuest support my broader curriculum goals?
- How can the WebQuest help students make connections across subject areas?
- Is the WebQuest clear and organized?
- Are the resource links within the WebQuest up-to-date and in good working order?

By applying these guidelines as you review WebQuests, you can ensure students are getting the most out of a WebQuest experience.

### Ready-to-Use WebQuests

Now that you know what to look for in a high-quality WebQuest, explore the wealth of options available. The Web sites below include numerous examples of WebQuests at multiple grade levels. These Web sites support the study of children's literature and offer a great place to start as you begin working with WebQuests in your classroom.

#### *San Diego City Schools Technology Challenge Grants*

This Web site presents numerous literature-focused WebQuests organized by grade level, including projects based on the books of Eric Carle, Kevin Henkes, and Roald Dahl. Many of these sites are available in both English and Spanish. With selections for many grade levels, this site features excellent WebQuests for your students.

#### *Literature Learning Ladders*

Annette Lamb and Larry Johnson's Literature Learning Ladders contains a database of WebQuests exploring popular children's literature selections ranging from kindergarten to high school. Resources are organized by grade level and include topics that range from an examination of the differences between frogs and toads in connection with Arnold Lobel's *Frog and Toad Are Friends*, to more complex

high-school themes, such as exploring the effects of World War I as seen in Erich Maria Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front*.

#### *Bowling Green State University Curriculum Resource Center*

This Web site contains a wide array of WebQuests that dovetail with the most popular children's literature. This comprehensive list is divided into WebQuests for grades K–3, 4–6, and 7–12, and includes popular children's fiction that can be read independently, as well as core works of literature.

#### *Aldert Root Leadership Magnet Elementary School*


"Flat Stanley Explores Communities" is a third-grade WebQuest connecting literature, writing, social studies, math, and geography. Tasks include creating a Flat Stanley character, writing a letter, mapping Flat Stanley's route to the recipient, calculating the costs of mailing, and researching the recipient's community. Directions for each task and referenced Internet resources are both student friendly and easy to use.

#### *The Best WebQuests*

Educator Tom March hosts this site that features a searchable WebQuest database spanning all content areas and age ranges. As of early 2008, 194 WebQuests were given the highest rating out of 1,181 reviewed. Examine these selected WebQuests to learn what makes these modules the best of the best. Don't miss the WebQuest articles and resources linked to this site.

### Designing Your Own WebQuests

As you become more familiar with WebQuests and begin to use them in your classroom, you will see how these activities promote inquiry-based learning. While there are many great examples of WebQuests available, you may want to tailor a WebQuest to the specific curriculum needs of your class. Before you begin designing, we suggest reading the online Curriculum Webs' article "IQ—Measuring the Inquiry Quotient of WebQuests." This resource contains in-depth information to make the creation process easier.

WebQuests are a great way to engage students in responding to literature, using the Internet, and solving authentic problems. They can be used individually or cooperatively. There are many excellent ready-made WebQuests available online. If you are inspired, create your own. 

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